



THE NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Reviewing Stand

EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

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Should Married Women Work?

A radio discussion over WGN and the Mutual Broadcasting System

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Broadcast continuously since 1934 by Northwestern University



THE REVIEWING STAND is a weekly radio forum presented by Northwestern University. The program was first broadcast by Station WGN, Chicago, October 14, 1934. It has been on the air continuously since that time, originating in the WGN studios, and, since 1935, carried by stations of the Mutual Broadcasting System. **THE REVIEWING STAND** presents members of the Northwestern University faculty and distinguished guests from business, government, education, and the press in round table discussions of contemporary problems—the questions that are in the news. The program is under the direction of James H. McBurney, Dean of the School of Speech, Northwestern University, and Miss Myrtle Stahl, Director of Educational Programs, WGN, Chicago.

The Northwestern University Reviewing Stand, published weekly beginning May 2, 1948, by the Offices of the Director of Radio (Public Relations). Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office, Evanston, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1875. Subscription price, \$1.00 for 16 weeks, \$2.00 for 32 weeks, \$2.50 for one year. Single copies, ten cents.

Should Married Women Work?

MR. McBURNEY: Now, Miss Reid, Mrs. Verry, Mr. Richards, we have had several complaints about our question: Should married women work? Here is one comment: "Your question implies that married women do not work." And then this writer goes on: "Have you ever tried taking care of a house, a husband and five children?" Have you ever tried that, Mrs. Verry?

MRS. VERRY: I have never tried taking care of a house, a husband and five children, but I have had a house, a husband and two children, and I think it is quite a lot of work. It certainly would be difficult to say that a married woman with a husband and children doesn't have work to do.

Outside the Home

MR. McBURNEY: I wonder if we aren't concerned primarily here today with married women *who are working outside the home*? Would that be a good rephrasing of this question?

MISS REID: It seems to me it would be advisable to narrow it somewhat more because you have very great differences among the married women. Some have children and some do not. Some have young children and some have older children. In addition to that, it seems to me you need to make a distinction as to whether the husband is present or not because you have married women whose husbands are present, and you have some whose husbands are absent. In addition to that you have married women such as the widowed and divorced group who are in many cases the sole earners in the family. In narrowing the question down, it seems to me you might look first of all at the largest group which are the married women with husbands, and then to think in terms of the married women with husbands who have children. After all, they do constitute the major group

for which there would be any concern in raising the question.

MR. McBURNEY: Certainly as a married man, Mrs. Verry, with a wife and three children I shouldn't have the temerity to suggest here in this public place that married women do not have occupations in the home when they have a home to take care of and three children. I am inclined to believe we might be wise in accepting Miss Reid's modifications here, but let me read one more comment before we go on, if I may. It goes like this: "I hope you make a distinction," this writer says, "between married women with children and those without children." Of course, that's just exactly what Miss Reid is proposing. The writer goes on to say, "Those with children belong in the home, and those without children ought to work." What do you think of that one?

MRS. VERRY: I think it is sort of ridiculous to generalize about situations as complicated as the situation of whether or not married women should work. It seems to me that some married women without children can make a pretty good contribution just staying at home, or I would leave out the "just staying at home," and keeping a good home and doing many of the volunteer things that women do in the community, being members of community groups and being good neighbors.

Statistics

MR. RICHARDS: I am wondering what the size of this problem is we are dealing with. How many married women do work? Do you have any statistics on that?

MISS REID: We have statistics in rather a refined type for the year 1948, and although that is four years ago, I think we can assume they pretty much describe the situation at the present time. Now, when you take

the married women who have husbands present in the family, you will find that 22 per cent of that group are gainfully employed, but if you look at these families in terms of the number of children, you will find that for the women who have children under six, only 9 per cent of those have gainful work during the year, 1948. If there were one or more children, six to seventeen, 21 per cent of those were gainfully employed, but if there were no children under seventeen, then you had 28 per cent gainfully employed. You can see these figures clearly show that the presence of the young child especially, and to some extent the older child, has a definite bearing on whether the mother is gainfully employed.

MR. McBURNEY: What are the trends with respect to these groups? Those figures are for what year?

MISS REID: 1948. We have data that go back to 1890. In that year 5 per cent of the married women were gainfully employed; in 1940, 15 per cent; in 1949, 24 per cent. So you see, there has been a very definite increase in the percentage of married women who are gainfully employed.

MRS. VERRY: Then, even if the percentage of working mothers of children under six is fairly small, the number I understand is about one and two-thirds million mothers. That's quite a lot of mothers of young children.

MISS REID: That is right. We have to take into account when you talk about 9 per cent of the families, you are talking about a very, very large group in terms of numbers.

'Important Trend'

MR. McBURNEY: It is obvious in raising the question, "Should married women work?" we are dealing with a pretty important trend here, aren't we? Do you deplore this trend, Mrs. Verry?

MRS. VERRY: I don't deplore it any more than I would deplore bad weather. Sometimes I don't like it very much. I am not even saying that I think for women to work out of the home is "bad weather," but I cer-

tainly wouldn't deplore it because I think it's a trend that is here to stay. It seems to me it is pretty clear that many married women are not going back into the kinds of homes they have to go back into now — two-room apartments and the husband gone most of the day. I am not inclined to deplore it, but rather to see what we can do about it.

MR. McBURNEY: Do you go along with that, Richards?

MR. RICHARDS: I would say if the mother's working outside the home represents a rejection to the child, then it is deplorable certainly. I have no way of knowing how much of the working activity of mothers does represent rejection to children. I am sure that some children are rejected by this, at least in a few instances.

MRS. VERRY: Do you think, though, that the mother who rejects her child is any worse off rejecting it by going out to work than rejecting it by not taking care of it at home?

MR. RICHARDS: Certainly not. I think many children are rejected with the mother in the home all the time so the work, it seems to me, is not necessarily crucial in this regard.

MR. McBURNEY: Why are these married women going out to work in such large numbers, Miss Reid?

'Relation to Income'

MISS REID: It is very hard to know why people do certain things. We do know when we look at the figures, it is closely related to the income of the husband. The figures appear to indicate that it is the sense of need to provide better living for the family, and to that extent the working mother is doing her best to take care of her children. I think we have to remember that in many instances she sees that it's her way to provide for children, but I do think we have to realize that it's a more complicated thing than that. You will find some situations where the mother feels very definitely the need of getting with an adult group for more hours of her day than is possible if she is at home, so I am sure it's to some extent mixed up with that.

MR. McBURNEY: Do you think you would find any factors in our national economy that would help explain this, Miss Reid?

MISS REID: Certainly during World War II there was a definite effort to recruit married women; and I have seen figures just lately on sizing up the manpower possibilities in the United States which attempted to gauge how many married women would be attracted into industry. To that extent the married women group is looked upon in some measure as a reservoir of extra manpower that could be recruited.

MR. RICHARDS: Don't you think there is another trend also: that youngsters together with adolescents are inclined to look at marriage as possible because both partners may work and contribute mutually to the support of the marriage?

Relation to Early Marriage

MISS REID: That is true. There has been a reduction in the age of marriage. In 1890 the average age of the first marriage of the male was 26 years, and in 1940 it was 24. There has been a somewhat similar reduction in the age of the female, but not quite so great. To some extent this may be occurring because of the difference in the nature of the support of the family. We do know that in the early years of marriage a considerable percentage of the women, before there is a child, are gainfully employed.

MR. RICHARDS: This economic arrangement is very nice for married couples, I think. Unfortunately, married couples sometimes have children, and the birth of the first child can well upset this pleasant economy, perhaps at a point before the married couple is prepared to restructure their home.

MR. McBURNEY: Of course, you put your finger there on what is very apparently the principal problem with which we are concerned today. Is it possible for a working mother to have her young children adequately taken care of? Is that possible, Mrs. Verry?

MRS. VERRY: I think it is possible

really. I think it puts a pretty hard burden on the working mother to do it, and when you look at the community, I think it puts a responsibility on the community to develop more resources than we have now to help the working mother, for whatever reason she is working, to make adequate provision for her young children.

MR. McBURNEY: What kind of resources are you talking about?

MRS. VERRY: I was talking primarily then about nursery schools and day-care centers for little children, because the school age child does go to school, and we have those children taken care of during the school hours. I would say, however, I think the development of after school centers for many school age children is almost as important as the development of nursery schools.

MR. McBURNEY: In other words, you seem to have a two-point program. That is, keep the schools open longer, keep the lights on so the school children can stay there until their mothers get home, and number two, a program of day nurseries for the children of working mothers.

'Door Key' Children

MRS. VERRY: Both of them to my mind are real unmet needs in our communities and in most of the communities throughout the country. We hear a great many complaints about the school-age children who are "door key" children, who go around with a house key around their necks and have nobody to go home to. It is clear to me that we should have more of our school programs extended to provide real care for those children after school. The little children are much in need of nursery schools. We have no nursery schools or almost none connected with our public school system. It is interesting that in Chicago we have about 350 day-care centers for nursery age children, but only in the last couple of years have those centers even been subject to state licensing. As a result, anybody who wanted to start a day-care center for children could do it, and some of them were very substandard.

MR. McBURNEY: What is your reaction to that kind of program, Miss Reid?

MISS REID: It seems to me that as you look at what has been happening you see an increase in the gainful employment of women. Now, we recognize the woman's contribution in the home is probably at its peak when the child is young and that it is hardest to secure adequate care outside the home for the child, much more difficult than, for example, to go out and buy a meal; we also recognize that society is extremely interested in the welfare of children. Now, as I see it, we have to recognize, at least, I feel myself, that it is very desirable to leave the decision as to whether or not to work to the mother. And if we see consequences that we don't like, it seems to me there are two lines of action that are possible. One is to say, "Well, many of the mothers are making their own decisions, wrong even from the standpoint of how they see the thing, and so we need to have some way to help the mothers to make decisions." And the second thing is that no matter what happens, there are probably going to be some mothers who make decisions that don't seem right from the standpoint of how society feels children ought to be reared. Then it seems to me you have to say, "What can we do about that end of the action?" That is the thing that Mrs. Verry has been talking about. I do believe we must help mothers to make better decisions, better in terms of their own welfare, because the final decision is going to be left to them.

Advice to Mothers

MR. RICHARDS: That suggests a very real problem as to how to reach mothers who want to work and bring to them the facts that you have suggested, the facts about how to raise children among other things.

MR. McBURNEY: May I suggest that Miss Reid and Mrs. Verry seem to be apart on this one issue. I asked earlier in the discussion whether you deplored this tendency for married women to work. Very apparently there is a substantial trend in that

direction. Mrs. Verry said she didn't deplore it any more than she would deplore bad weather and equivocated a bit on bad weather; but you say, Miss Reid, we ought to leave the situation to the mother, that we apparently do have some responsibility in advising these mothers. What kind of advice would you give them? We can't beg that question. Do you advise them to stay home and take care of their kids, or do you advise the State of Illinois or State of California to subsidize child centers for their youngsters? Either we are going to advise them or we are not, and if they are entitled to advice, this is a good place to give the advice.

MISS REID: I wouldn't advise them. I would merely try to get them to see the effects on the child. Now, if we are going to carry on an adequate educational program of that kind, we need more facts because we are talking here a good deal about the effects on the children, and we really don't know.

Consistent Mothering

MRS. VERRY: We know quite a lot about the bad effects on children of not having consistent mothering during their early years, but of course, to say a child has to have consistent mothering doesn't mean to say his mother shouldn't go to work if she can get consistent mothering for him and adequate experiences.

MR. RICHARDS: It is very important that young babies, and perhaps the child throughout the preschool years, should have the opportunity to live very closely with one mother or "mother figure," one woman who will have the mother's role. This is of decreasing importance, perhaps, as you go through that early school period, but of vital significance in early infancy.

MRS. VERRY: Yes, I agree absolutely with that. The community ought to do everything it can to make it possible for all mothers of children under two to stay at home with their children, and when that isn't possible, to give those mothers a great deal of help in getting continuous mothering for the children.

MR. McBURNEY: How are you going to get continuous mothering for a child when the child's mother is employed?

MRS. VERRY: Well, if the child is under two, you can get what is almost continuous mothering by providing a foster family home to which the mother can bring the child in the morning and pick it up in the evening. It's true it isn't one mother, but it's at least only two, a foster mother and his own mother. I have seen children weather that pretty comfortably if both of the mothers are alike and congenial, give the same kind of handling, and if it's carefully planned.

MR. McBURNEY: Who will pay for facilities of that sort, Mrs. Verry? For these foster homes and for these day nursery schools and so forth?

MRS. VERRY: Shouldn't it be a shared responsibility? In so far as the mother is one of these typical working mothers that we have spoken about who has a husband supporting her, she probably should pay out of her salary for the care of her child; but the mothers I come in contact with are, some of them, also responsible for the support of themselves and their children or their child, and I think the community has got to help in that situation.

Absence of Husband

MISS REID: You are bringing in here the other group. That is, the group where the husband is not present. I would like to point out that this is a group where the gainful employment is much higher. Whereas, with the married woman where the husband is present, 22 per cent of those are gainfully employed, 49 per cent are employed where the husband is absent, and 37 per cent where the woman is widowed or divorced. Here you have a case where the earnings of the woman are much more important to the support of the family and hence the pressure is very much greater.

MRS. VERRY: And where it becomes very important for her to have access to good care for her child while she works because she is carrying a pretty heavy burden to support herself and

do the housework at night and take care of the child.

MISS REID: Now, there is another very interesting figure. When you take the married women who are living with their husbands and have one child under six, 9 per cent of those are employed, but if you take the other women who have no husband present, 49 per cent of those who have a child under six are gainfully employed.

MR. McBURNEY: With that 49 per cent one can be profoundly sympathetic, and I think society has a very definite responsibility there, and I can be profoundly sympathetic, if anyone is interested in it, with married mothers where the husband is at home and the income is inadequate to meet the needs of the family. I suspect society has a responsibility there too. But I am thinking about the women who choose to work because they want to work. They get two incomes coming into the family, but the neighbor sits next door with one income coming in, scrimping along, leaving the mother at home to take care of the youngsters. I question whether society has any responsibility to augment the income of family "A" while family "B" sits home and sweats it out.

MRS. VERRY: I am not sure that society should augment the income, but if you are . . .

MR. McBURNEY: They augment it indirectly if they provide day nurseries to take care of the children.

MRS. VERRY: Can't they provide a day nursery and have the mother pay if she is able, if the family budget will swing it — pay for that care? You see, the thing I am concerned with is that if the mother is going to work, society has such a big stake in having the child have good care.

Relation to Delinquency

MR. McBURNEY: I would go along with that. I was wondering, Richards, whether you have any information on the incidence of juvenile delinquency, broken homes and so forth, among these families where the mother works. Do we have any facts on that?

MR. RICHARDS: I know of no breakdown of figures which would relate such problems to the specific factor of the mother working.

MR. McBURNEY: Do you have any information on that, Miss Reid?

MISS REID: No, I have seen no figures on that. I think we have to realize those factors are very mixed up with low income which is always associated with gainful employment of the mothers.

MR. McBURNEY: In other words, are you saying when we imply these youngsters who have working mothers are having a rough time that we are merely guessing?

MR. RICHARDS: I think we have seen in earlier discussion the mother's motivation is the important thing, and her working to support the home, contribute toward that support, may well be in the best interest of the children. In other words, it's the nature of her motivation, the warmth, the feeling toward her children, it seems to me, that might well be reflected in her going out to get a job as well as staying home and mothering her children physically. Those are the important considerations, and I think it would be impossible to say that simply holding a job is a rejection to a child necessarily. It could be, but . . .

Nursery School Experience

MRS. VERRY: Yes, and I think we have to realize, too, how really difficult many of the housing situations are, particularly for young families with young preschool children. A family with one or two preschool children in a two-room apartment, perhaps with the neighbors complaining if the children make a noise, is not really a good situation for those children. A mother may really be doing a very good thing for her child if she goes out to work in order to pay for a nursery school experience for that child where he can run and holler and have some outdoor play.

MR. RICHARDS: I agree with that.

MR. McBURNEY: You keep talking about these two-room apartments which suggests that in your mind this

is largely a problem of large metropolitan centers. Is that a fact?

MISS REID: If you look at the figures for the villages in the United States, they show very much the same pattern as for the urban communities, not exactly, but slightly lower employment, but still not so much that you would feel it is a totally different situation.

MR. McBURNEY: Of course, I imagine the youngsters in the smaller towns have a bit more freedom to get around than they would have in a large metropolitan center.

MRS. VERRY: And I may be dreaming about something I don't know anything about, but it seems to me they would be a little safer for an hour or two after school than they are in Chicago with no home to go to. I know I have a tendency to idealize the country town and perhaps it isn't such a safe place, but I think a child left on the streets in Chicago or left in a small apartment in Chicago is probably worse off than the same child in the small town. At least their neighbors know him and his parents, and here perhaps not even the neighbors know who he is.

MR. McBURNEY: There is one factor in this whole problem that we have left essentially undiscussed, and that is the role of these married women in the work force. If that has increased from—what was it in 1890?

MISS REID: 5 per cent in 1890 to 24 per cent in 1949.

MR. McBURNEY: That represents some millions of people added to the work force. Now, are these married women taking jobs that ought to be available to men and entering into competition with men in a way that is embarrassing?

Economic Effect

MISS REID: It's very hard to discuss that question at the present time and say "Yes" to your question, but I think we have to look at the thing in these terms. During the period from 1890 to 1949 there has been a great period of expanding prosperity in the United States with a few major exceptions of short periods of depres-

sion, but the long-run trend has been toward a much higher real income and that higher real income has occurred because we have made use of our productive resources, and part of the labor force that has been drawn in that has helped to make America prosperous has been the addition of the married women to the labor force. That, I think, is a very important thing to recognize. So I would say that on the whole this has been a good thing economically in terms of increased productivity. However, we have to recognize that if a woman gives up the more important job that she can contribute in the household for gainful work, it is not an addition to the total economy. In many of the cases, and probably in most of the cases, however, it has been a net addition to the welfare of society.

MR. McBURNEY: The question I am raising here about the competitive influence of married women in the labor force sounds a bit academic at this time when we are looking for help and encouraging these people to work, but most of us around the table — possibly with the exception of young Dr. Richards here — can remember the time when these people were very real competition. Do I do you an injustice, Tom?

MR. RICHARDS: I don't get the meaning of your remarks. [Laughter]

MR. McBURNEY: I can remember the time when, for instance, school boards took unfavorable attitudes toward the employment of married women, not because they were unsuccessful teachers, but because they thought those jobs ought to be reserved for somebody else, and I assume that attitude has prevailed in the case of a good many jobs. Does that make any sense at all?

Relation to Unemployment

MISS REID: Oh, yes, that makes sense in a situation where you have a great deal of unemployment, and I think whenever we have a large amount of unemployment, there will be criticism of women in the labor

force where it is an additional income in the family.

MR. McBURNEY: A legitimate criticism, you think?

MISS REID: There are so many other legitimate criticisms that ought to be made in that situation that I think it wouldn't hurt to add that to it, but it's only one of the many, many situations that ought to be taken into account. I think it's rather interesting that in 1949 the average income of husbands was \$3,000 and the average income of the wives in that group who were working was \$1,100, so that the men are the main support of the family in the situation.

MR. McBURNEY: If that is true, those figures are exceedingly interesting. You are comparing \$3,000 with what?

Effect on Wage Scales

MISS REID: With \$1100.

MR. McBURNEY: All those salaries sound pretty low now, don't they, but does that mean as these married women come into industry, into jobs, that they depress wage scales?

MISS REID: They are only depressing their own in that case. There is a big gap there. I mean, if they pooled the two together, there might be some grounds for believing that.

MR. McBURNEY: You think there is no serious problem in this matter of depressing wages?

MISS REID: I don't think so. Anyway, we don't grow rich by not having production.

MRS. VERRY: But we must remember that all production isn't just in making things either, that the woman who stays at home and makes a good life for her family and her neighbors is producing.

MISS REID: That's a very, very good point. Even though we don't put a dollar figure on it, it's a very important part of our total production.

ANNOUNCER: I am sorry to interrupt but our time is up.

Suggested Reading



Compiled by William Huff,
and M. Helen Perkins, Reference Department,
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SHALLCROSS, RUTH. *Should Married Women Work?* New York, Public Affairs Committee, 1940. (Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 49)

Condensation of a study made under the auspices of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs which discusses; "Married Women in the Job World," "Why Married Women Work," "How They Spend Their Wages," "What the Economist Says," "What the Sociologist Says," and the "Legality of Restrictions Against Married Women."

American Association of University Women Journal 44:73-5, Jan., '51. "What Happens to the Children?" H. MILLS.

The problems involved in caring for and educating children of mothers pressed into defense industrial work, with a list of six specific suggestions as to how to meet the challenge.

American Federationist 57:28-31, Jan., '50. "They Need the Money." F. S. MILLER.

A discussion, with statistics, of the various age groups of women who work, the reasons why they work, and their status in the labor force.

American Federationist 58:10-11, July, '51. "Women at Work, Then and Now." F. S. MILLER.

An interesting history of women at work in the United States from colonial times to the present day.

American Magazine 149:36-7, Feb., '50. "Wife Trouble? Get Her a Job." M. F. LANGLUIR.

Stories emphasizing the types of advantages accruing to families where the mothers have held interesting part-time jobs.

Atlantic Monthly 185:51-4, Jan., '50. "Fair, Fit and Fifty." L. WHITE, JR.

A thought provoking study of the need of the older married woman for constructive work, with suggestions as to what communities, colleges and universities, and the women themselves might do to fill this need both now and in the future.

Harpers 203:57-63, Dec., '51. "Two-Income Family." N. B. MAVITY.

"The working wives of 1951 are not motivated by feminism, but by common sense applied to economic dilemma."

International Labour Review 63:677-97, June, '51. "Employment of Married Women and Mothers of Families."

The extent to which women of various countries work outside their homes, reasons for such work, and the division of time between work and home duties.

Journal of Home Economics 41:549-51, Dec., '49. "Married Women in Today's Labor Force." F. WHITELOCK.

A labor economist in the Woman's Bureau of the U. S. Department of Labor tells, with statistics and comments, the story of employed married women.

Journal of Home Economics 44:16-18, Jan., '52, "The Employment of Rural Women." P. S. TAYLOR.

Statistics and observations on the work of rural women, the care of their children, and the employment outlook.

Ladies Home Journal 68:25, Sept., '51. "Working Mothers."

The neglect of children and rise of juvenile delinquency during the nation's period of peak employment in World War II make many people feel that everything possible should be done to keep the mothers of young children in the home.

New York Times Magazine p. 47, Aug. 26, '51. "Working Mother's Job and a Half." V. BROWN.

Suggests that the working mother has a constant problem with her conscience and lists the reasons why.

New York Times Magazine p. 13, Sept. 9, '51: Discussion p. 4, Sept. 30, '51. "Why Twenty Million Women Work." G. SAMUELS.

An aeroplane factory reveals the economic and idealistic reasons why women, married and unmarried, have joined the labor force.

New York Times Magazine p. 26, Jan. 13, '52. "Growing Need for Day-Care Centers." D. BARCLAY.

Urges that surveys be made of community needs for day-care centers, preparatory to seeking government and state aid for care of children of working mothers.

Parents Magazine 25:40-1, Sept., '50. "Should a Mother Work?" R. S. GOLDMAN.

The Deputy Commissioner of Social Services in the Chicago Department of Welfare, the mother of two children, gives some of the questions a mother should ask herself before she decides whether or not to work.

Parents Magazine 26:122-3, Oct., '51. "When a Mother Works." J. WELLS.

What a nursery school did for a working mother and her two-and-a-half year-old child.

Parents Magazine 27:34-5, Jan., '52. "Stealing Is a Symptom." R. K. McCARTY.

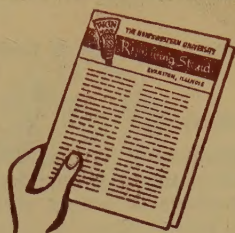
Stealing by children and adolescents is symptomatic of lack of parental love or guidance, the latter often the result of both parents working, with little or no time for supervision of the child.

School and Society 70:444, Dec., 31, '49. "Homemaking and the Career Woman." I. L. KARDEL.

Is Society losing the services of many talented women by failing to provide remunerative part-time work that can be done at home or at an office.

U. S. News and World Report 28:34, June 2, '50. "Wife's Place? More Say 'In a Job.' "

The pros and cons for industry of having women, especially married women, in the labor force. Interesting histogram gives statistics for 1940 and 1950.



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